(b) whether India has not signed any agreement with Russia inspite of Russia being our old friend;

(c) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(d) whether Government are worried by reactions of the neighbouring countries regarding the news of a pact signed with America?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI ANAND SHARMA): (a) Yes. Russia and Myanmar signed an inter-governmental agreement in Moscow on May 15, 2007 for cooperation in the establishment of a Centre for Nuclear Studies in Myanmar.

(b) India has signed agreements with the Russian Federation relating to cooperation in nuclear energy.

(d) Government have noted statements by neighbouring countries on the India-US Agreement for Cooperation concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy.

Talks on Sir Creek issue

1278. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:
SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether representatives of India and Pakistan met on May 17 and 18 for talks on the Sir Creek issue and exchanged maps of joint survey conducted in March, 2007;

(b) if so, the outcome of the talks held;

(c) whether again Home Secretaries of both the countries also met in July, 2007 to finalize the issues; and

(d) to what extent agreements have been signed and reached in regard to all the disputes between the two countries?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Yes. The two sides discussed the delimitation of the maritime boundary as well as the delineation of the boundary in the Sir Creek. They exchanged maps/ charts showing their respective positions on the delineation of the boundary in the Sir Creek and delimitation of the maritime boundary. The two sides expressed satisfaction at the successful completion of the joint survey of Sir Creek and adjoining areas and agreed to continue discussions for an amicable settlement of the issue.

(c) and (d) Home Secretary level talks between India and Pakistan were held within the framework of the Composite Dialogue on 3-4 July, 2007 in New Delhi. In this meeting both sides strongly condemned all acts of terrorism and underlined the imperative need for effective and sustained measures against terrorist activities.

They recognised that terrorists and criminals in either country need to be given swift and effective punishment. The two sides agreed to release by August 14-15, 2007, those prisoners who have been granted consular access, whose national status has been verified and who have completed their prison sentences. To this end, they agreed that immediate steps will be taken by either side to reconcile their numbers to facilitate their early release on completion of necessary formalities. The two sides also agreed to release by August 14-15, 2007 the remaining fishermen in each other's custody on completion of due process. They further decided to take immediate steps to release the fishing boats, excluding trawlers, in each other's custody. Both sides agreed that the recently formed Committee on Prisoners, comprising eminent retired judges from the two countries, will hold two meetings, one in India and the other in Pakistan, within a period of 3 months. Separate working groups discussed in detail the drafts of the revised Visa and Consular Access Agreements aimed at liberalising and making existing provisions more effective. The text of the Agreement on Consular Access has been finalised. Also, they made considerable progress towards early finalisation and signing of the Visa Agreement.

Friendship with Central Asian Republics

1279. KUMARI NIRMALA DESHPANDE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the steps that are being taken to strengthen the traditional friendship between India and Central Asian Republics;

(b) whether there are any plans to improve road and rail connectivity; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) India has close and cordial relations with the Central Asian Republics. There have been regular exchanges of visits at high levels and official meetings including those related to Inter Governmental Commissions, Foreign Office Consultations and Joint Working Groups are held frequently. India and Central Asian countries also enjoy warm people-to-people contacts and there are regular academic and cultural exchanges. Trade volumes are increasing and Government of India has undertaken developmental projects in fields such as Information Technology, food processing and hydro-electricity. Additionally, Central Asian nationals have availed of scholarships under the Indian Technical Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and other programmes for training or studies in India.

(b) and (c) Direct road and rail connections between India and Central Asia are not immediately possible due to difficulties related to terrain and transit. However, India is working under the framework of the International North South Transport Corridor project to improve surface connectivity to countries in Central Asia.